

**Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma, PhD**  
*National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO)*  
*Abuja-FCT,*  
*Abuja.*  
*Email: dr.barclays@gmail.com*

## **Nigerian Video Films and the Image Question: A Critical Reading of Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Home in Exile***

### **Abstract**

The video film medium in Nigeria has become very engaging, both to the producers and the consumers. An electronics merchant, Kenneth Nnebue, pioneered the production of Igbo language films on video tapes for home consumption. The experimental work (*Living in Bondage* 1992), directed by Chris Obi-Rapu, was an instant success and it made other electronics merchants, spare part dealers, and so on, to follow suit. Somehow, the video film industry became more of a jungle thereafter, as just anybody could venture into it. Curiously, government has been a mere distant observer, for close to twenty years now, oblivious of the billions of naira accruable as revenue to the national coffers. The fact is that the global popularity of Nigerian video films is not in doubt, considering the inroad many star actors and actresses have made in many African countries and beyond. But the question that needs to be answered is to what extent these video films are positively portraying our image abroad, especially in the face of government's rebranding project. This stems from the concern in some quarters that there is a whole gamut of negativity in our video films. As it were, the ability to create our own images and capture our own stories has given us a voice and a power to change perceptions of ourselves, our surroundings, and our cultures, both locally and internationally. In this study, therefore, we shall attempt a critical study of Lancelott Oduwa Imasuen's *Home in Exile*, to see how the Nigerian video film industry could be invaluable in the projection of country's image in the global arena.



## Introduction

The video film medium in Nigeria has become very engaging, both to producers and consumers. It is common knowledge now that the industry dates back to 1992, when the experimental effort of an Ibo businessman, Kenneth Nnebue, paid off. He was originally involved in the distribution of audio tapes, and had ventured into the production of Yoruba video films (Haynes and Okome 24). Since the last breath had been snuffed out of the cinema industry due to economic depression, among other factors, and there was a downturn in sponsorship of local television dramas in favour of Mexican soaps and novellas, Nnebue mooted the idea of putting an Igbo drama on tape for domestic consumption. The outcome was *Living in Bondage* Pt.1, directed by Chris Obi-Rapu, which was an instant success (Ayakoroma, "Trends in the Development" 2).

As it is the general attitude in Nigerians, other businessmen followed the example as spare part dealers, electronics merchants, and even building materials sellers, veered into video film production as it promised instant returns on investments. Thus, two or three traders could pool their resources to produce a film, and plough the sales back to produce two or three more films. After that, each of them would go his different way to start individual productions. These Executive Producers were to later transform from mere observers, who waited to get returns on their investments, to active players, producing and even directing their films. The reasons were that they needed to save costs and, of course, protect their investments (Ayakoroma, "Trends in Contemporary" 52; Ejike 1).

Consequent on the above phenomenon, the video film industry in Nigeria became more of a jungle: a case of survival of the fittest as everybody wants to bite a piece of the cake. It is not surprising then that for close to twenty years now, government has been just a distant observer, oblivious of the billions of naira that have been lost. The little monies that go into government coffers (that is if it does happen that way) are payments to the Censor's Board and the little customs duties for importation of tapes and other equipment. But one redeeming fact is that our children have come to identify with, not only Hollywood stars, but Nigerian video film stars in an industry that has come to be referred to as Nollywood.

The term, Nollywood, is said to have been coined by the *Financial*



*Times* of New York, to describe the Nigerian video film industry, just like Hollywood (America) and Bollywood (India). As far back as 2005, the industry is said to have generated well over ₦55 billion, providing jobs for more than 300,000 Nigerians. Then, it was rated the third most lucrative film industry in the world, after Hollywood and Bollywood (Onishi 1; "Nollywood;" Nollywood Generates;" McCall 98-100). But analysts were to submit in 2008 that it had become the second largest film industry after Bollywood. The implication here is that film industries in advanced economies like Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Canada, Italy, Japan, China, among others, cannot compare to that which obtains presently in Nigeria.

In this work, we shall argue that the video film industry has become highly engaging, contributing immensely to the positive image of Nigeria in the global arena, to the extent that our children now identify with the stars it has created instead of Hollywood and Bollywood stars, so much so that apart from footballers, these stars have become our cultural ambassadors. Furthermore, the selling point in Nollywood which has generated interest in advanced film cultures is to resort to the video format; so there is need for stakeholders to factor in and produce standard films in the mould of *Home in Exile* that would engender the spirit of patriotism.

### **The Video Film Format**

One of the approaches in Hollywood to maximize profits is that once movies have been released and screened in cinema theatres for given periods, such movies are syndicated for broadcast on television under agreed terms. The films are later transferred into video cassettes – now into VCDs (video compact discs) and DVDs (digital video discs) with changes in technology – for home viewing. At the advent of television in Nigeria, there was a plethora of such foreign films inundating most of the air time. Consequently, electronic dealers also added sale and rental of home video films as a lucrative line of business. Little wonder then that when the video film industry started in Nigeria, productions were often referred to as *home video films* and the first set of producers were predominantly electronic dealers and foreign home video film sellers.

Basically, video films are "dramatic features shot on video and



marketed on cassettes and sometimes also exhibited publicly with video projectors or television monitors" (Haynes 9). For instance, Nnebue shot *Living in Bondage* with an ordinary VHS camcorder on a budget of one hundred and fifty thousand naira (Nnennyelike and Taiwo). But in the bid to improve the quality of productions, there have been progressive graduations to Super VHS, Betacam, mini Digital Video (mini-DV), Digital Video (DV), and High Definition (HD) format. Also, some Nollywood directors, like Jeta Amata, Teco Benson, and Mahmood Alli-Balogun, have started doing their shoots with cine cameras.

Apart from the relatively low cost of production, the video film format has certain attractions. Unlike the celluloid format, the video film convention offers the director near full control of the direction of his production in the sense that the outcome of his experimentations with picture composition, camera movements, sound, light, use of colours, costume and set design, acting, and so on (all of which constitute the aesthetics of film), could be ascertained and corrected where necessary through immediate previews. Consequently, a director goes into the post-production of his work with some level of assurance that he has had a good day's shoot. This is not the case with the celluloid, as the development of the rushes (or printing of negatives) takes quite some time; and where there are anomalies, an entirely new plan has to be made for a re-shoot of such a film project. We could realize the import of the above if we recall experiences from the olden days when black and white photographs were in vogue. Someone goes with excitement to a studio to take a snapshot; and after many days of anxious waiting, he goes to collect the photo only to be told that the negative was "burnt," or it was "over-exposed," and that he had to re-take the snapshot! There is no gainsaying the fact that such a person cannot recreate the original emotions that pervaded the atmosphere under which the snapshot was taken in the first place.

### **The Video Craze**

In recent times, there have been increases in research efforts in Nollywood by film scholars to decipher how best to package, market, and transmit the by-products of films and video works. Today, every country is looking within the precincts of its cultural milieu to

explore and device useful platforms to enable it employ covertly, the instrument of culture via the arts, to market its national agenda to its people and the rest of the world. Since the emergence of borderless global communities with advancement in media technology, the video film format has become a veritable tool for achieving this objective. This stems from the fact that it is so easy to penetrate the privacy of individuals in nations, a feat that was thought impossible previously.

Interestingly, several countries are working assiduously to increase their global share of viewing audience for film and video works. Thus, we can posit that culture has indeed become a critical element in film making. The dominant theme of film and video works across the globe can attest to this. For instance, if you carry out a check on films from the United States, India, and Mexico, which are popular in Nigeria today, you will observe that cultural idiosyncrasies and worldviews of these countries are projected. In other words, they are tacitly selling their values and images through the films. This explains why some countries, especially the advanced economies, now use film as an instrument for influencing others under the cover of Cultural Diplomacy. There is no doubt that culture has a profound influence on all aspects of behaviour, determining how individuals perceive and interpret phenomena. It has therefore become necessary that major players in the Nigerian video film industry understand their role as cultural ambassadors and contribute their quota towards building a positive image for the country through films. It means stakeholders in the industry, such as script writers, producers, directors, costumiers, actors, editors, and so on, need to always ensure that they approach their productions with a sense of patriotism. This will minimize, to a large extent, aesthetic ambiguities as the message a production sends across is vital in the way outsiders look at the country.

Marshall McLuhan's position that the world had become a global village through the mass media plays out every day with the impact of Nigerian video films in world entertainment scene. Of all the media of mass communication, film has the most universal appeal and impact. Video films act as a very potent socialization medium that shapes ideas, styles, attitudes, and cultures of nations, in the sense that it is a giant mirror which reflects the values and ideals of



a given society. When properly developed, a film can overcome the limitations of language and other known socio-cultural barriers through its power of visual imagery. Music, colour, and sound in films add value while conveying the same message to audiences of heterogeneous cultural backgrounds. Because of this penetrating quality, videos have the potential of influencing and moulding end-users to cultures, ideas, and values.

### **Nigeria and the Image Question**

There is no doubt that the image of Nigeria has been battered for quite some time in the face of the international community. This has been occasioned by leadership failure over the years: many years of unstable military rule had bastardized the Nigerian nation, and there has been the problem of reputation management. The level of negativity has been such that once Nigerians surface in any foreign country, especially the so-called developed countries and emerging economies, they are viewed with suspicion. Thus, sobriquets such as 419ners, drug couriers, smugglers, money launderers, human traffickers, sex hawkers, ritualists, and so on, have all been associated with Nigerians.

A brief review of post-colonial Nigeria shows that political instability occasioned by bereft leadership has dented the image of the country abroad. The policy direction has been warped, to the extent that a country that was agro-based abandoned our natural resources in favour of crude oil. Unfortunately, the oil boom of the 1960s and 1970s soon turned to "oil doom," just as the country witnessed brain drain. It was a situation where the good hands trained by the country found solace in "checking out" of the country in search of greener pastures. Young girls also found satisfaction in commercial sex trade in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Holland, South Africa, and many other foreign countries, all for hard currency. Instead of ameliorating the situation, massive looting of the public till became the lot of our leaders as they acquired properties abroad to the detriment of the local economy. Our leaders were happy buying refineries abroad when the ones in the country are unable to refine any petroleum products. They acquired five star hotels abroad when they could not build and operate same in the country.

With a dwindling economy that had abandoned agriculture in



order to depend largely on crude oil, an educational system that is churning out hundreds of thousands of half-baked graduates every year, industries that are collapsing every day with their dependence on power generating plants instead of public power supply, currency that is losing its value by the day, a police system that is massively corrupt, and youths that see every foreign product as better than whatever that obtains locally, there is no doubt that these issues would always agitate the minds of the creative artist. It is of interest that as a debtor nation, Nigeria celebrated an \$18bn International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt relief in 2002 ("Nigeria to Get" 1).

Some questions that readily come to mind are: Where did post-Colonial Nigeria get it wrong? Were the foundations not strong enough to sustain the country after independence? Can't we have steady power supply for one month when Ghana is talking about ten years uninterrupted power supply (UPS)? Why are our youths embracing anything foreign to the detriment of local products? How do we redirect our steps? How can the video film industry contribute towards laundering the country's image? In attempting to find answers to the above questions, one would come to the conclusion that the issues are multifarious and could indeed provide very apt subject matters for our video film producers.

### **Nigerian Video Films and the Image Question**

Significantly, films are exponents of the social, political, economic, cultural, and technological developments of the producing country. Thus, their contact with an audience from a different cultural background has some implications. The films could arouse the interest of such audiences positively towards the situations so portrayed. In other words, such films would then be transmitting, promoting and preserving the culture, and have the likelihood of influencing the audiences' culture through development of interest. This is coterminous with the view that, "what movies offer society, the manner in which it is offered, and its content are inextricably bound up with the condition of industrialization" (Ekwuazi 20). To the foregoing, we would add the social, economic, political, philosophical, cultural, and artistic developments. Most popular cultures our children imbibe today, ranging from music, clothes, hairstyles, foods, drinks, etc., are through their contact with various



foreign entertainment media. This apparently explains why the apartheid government of the old South Africa did not allow television broadcasting in its enclave until the repressive regime was dismantled (Ayakoroma, "Foreign Films" 26). This contention is probably out of the realisation that films have universal appeal and impact. A film can rise above language limitations and cultural barriers because through "the powers of its visual images, its use of music and sound effects," a film will succeed in "conveying much the same message to audiences of heterogeneous background" (Opubor and Nwuneli 1). This explains why in his analysis, Paul Rotha observes that good films are dangerous. He captures the powerful nature of film thus:

They are dangerous because of their instantaneous impact on the minds and emotions of the world's citizenry. Educationalists have proved that the visual image makes a deeper impression than the verbal or aural image. In this small country, 30,000,000 people see films every week. They see eighty American films to twenty British or other films. They absorb a large amount of the message or propaganda behind them (170).

In the Hollywood convention, the American dream is projected in such a way that America is seen as the ideal country regardless of the sovereignty or integrity of other countries. Most of the Hollywood war/action films portray America as a dedicated country, ready to sacrifice everything to save just one of its own citizens. It is not surprising then that a negative image of the old United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was always portrayed in American war films. Take *First Blood* I, II, & III, for instance, starring Sylvester Stallone as Rambo, the star role for which he is best remembered. This multi-million dollar film shows the lead character, Rambo, exterminating thousands of Russian soldiers single-handedly. We see similar things in several war/action films – the Russians, the Germans, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Vietnamese, the West (Red) Indians, or the Africans are always the vanquished (Ayakoroma, "Trends in Contemporary" 27). Put simply, the American dream is well projected in all Hollywood war/action films, as reflected in the following summation:



The cowboy is the archetypal American hero: in real life he conquered the West; in his celluloid form, he conquered the world. And with the cowboy came Hollywood and all it stood for in film economics and aesthetics (Sandford 103-4).

We are thus in agreement with Ekwuazi that, "the ultimate function of any film and the auteur's need to accommodate the exigencies of politics determine *what* aspect(s) of truth/reality to be mediated, and *how*" (Ekwuazi 33). This is because with the melange of foreign films, the thinking then was that the bastardization of the African culture could only be checked if our filmmakers produced films that would adequately promote our lives. This is co-terminous with the view of a former Managing Director of the Nigerian Film Corporation, Brendan Shehu, who observes that the cinema in Africa

has gradually become the instrument for the articulation and projection of the dominant beliefs and values of Africa to the world community. An immediate implication of this is the growth of intellectual curiosity on the role of cinema in shaping the culture of Africa and simultaneously, how cinema itself has shaped the culture of Africa (Shehu 97).

As it were, film is a multidimensional medium that captures snapshots of real life, real people, real places, and even when in an imagined setting, real stories of life's experiences. A film production is a mindshare business in the sense that movies from all over the world are in competition to influence the viewers' mind. We all think in pictures; our memory is a collection of images and experiences we have seen either directly or through pictures. This is what makes movies the most powerful influence in the society the world over. This power was for over 50 years a very well guarded exclusive asset to the United States of America and they used it well. We have cited the military might and invincibility of the US Marines as shown in films like *First Blood* and *Rambo*, starring Sylvester Stallone. What may not be so obvious is that over the years of watching these movies, our language, dressing, food choices, cars, tastes, and preferences have become more American rather



than Nigerian. These are evident in the music videos made by Nigerian musicians; the earrings worn by young boys; the trousers worn by our boys and girls that do not cover the buttocks (called "sagging"); the micro-mini skirts that unabashedly reveal the essentials between the laps; the dresses that boldly or mischievously show cleavages, even when they are flabby; bras that seem to hawk the boobs no matter the small size; the short blouses that do not cover the navel (called "provoker"); and even in gesticulations and attitudes which challenge our traditional behavioural patterns.

It could be said that Nigerian video films are deep-rooted socially, in the sense that they not only reflect the ways of life of Nigerians, but also tell stories of Nigeria's past and present. More so, the films depict the culture of the target audience and are produced by people who also live the cultural milieu of the audience themselves. If not anything else, the village scenes, the political and traditional justice systems, land tenure, costumes, the hair-dos, tattoos, drumming, singing and dancing, indigenous foods and drinks, as well as religious beliefs exhibited in most of the films, tell the past history of Nigeria and its unity in diversity. For instance, the first Nigerian video film, *Living in Bondage*, projected socio-cultural traits and propensity of the average Igbo trader, who will stop at nothing to have a breakthrough in business. Thus, Nigerian video films are not only rebuilding such cultural values but playing a very significant role in Nigeria's socio-politico-cultural influence in Africa, and the Black world in general. Hence, Nollywood, the acclaimed second largest film industry in the world, is a cultural product that tells the story of Nigeria and Nigeria's past and present.

It is pertinent to note that in its close to two decades of existence, Nollywood has gone through some generic and developmental trends as we have examined in details elsewhere (Ayakoroma, "Genres" 266-87). Somehow, there are some shades of opinion to the effect that there is nothing like Nollywood; that the industry is celebrating quantity instead of quality; that the executive producers have killed the industry to the extent that it is living on past glories; that there is undue emphasis on rituals and occultic practices in the films; that the country is not well projected; that the industry is all about sex-for-roles or sexual harassment; or that the scripts lack depth because you can easily predict the end of the films at the beginning.



In spite of such concerns, the truth is that Nollywood has taken Nigeria to higher heights in the area of revenue generation, institutionalising film awards, cultural tourism, and cultural diplomacy. This underscores our submission that perhaps apart from football (soccer), Nollywood appears to have projected Nigeria more than any other sector of the economy (Ayakoroma, "Trends in the Development" 1-22).

The global popularity of Nigerian video films is not in doubt, considering the in-road many star actors and actresses have been received in many countries. But the aspect that needs to be addressed is to what extent these films are positively portraying our image abroad. This stems from the views in certain quarters that there is a whole gamut of negativity in our video films. There is no doubt that this ability to create our own images and capture our own stories has given us a voice and a power to change perceptions of ourselves, about our surroundings, about our cultures, both locally and internationally. Though we have in our hands, the power to create social change, whether we have used this power so far to our advantage is subject to debate.

Movies have the power to translate people across social strata because ordinary people who did not command the respect of their peers and communities have through Nigerian video films become leading lights, role models, and social icons of their nation. For example, Patience Ozokwor, also known as Mama Gee, was retired and was unknown until Nigerian video filmmakers featured her in some productions. Today, she commands a huge local and international follower-ship and is very popular in Germany, Holland, and Italy, among other foreign countries. We know how Sam Loco, after a very sound professional training from the University of Ibadan, used to waste days on end under *abe-egi*, at the National Theatre, Iganmu-Lagos, waiting for productions that never came; today, he lives comfortably from because of his being in the industry. Under normal setting, the duo of Chinedu Ikedieze (Aki) and Osita Iheme (Paw-Paw) would have been seen as handicaps. With due credit to Amayo Uzo Phillips, who saw the potentials of pairing them in *Akinokwa* (1999), they have relied upon their other talents to surmount the limitations they would have otherwise faced in life because they are now Nollywood stars. It will not be an



understatement if we posit that these two incredible young men are bona fide super stars, projecting Nollywood, and indeed Nigeria, all over Africa, Europe, and America.

### **A Critical Reading of *Home in Exile***

In *Home in Exile*, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen tells the story of Prince David (played by Desmond Elliot), who after studying medicine in the United States of America, leaves a lucrative job there and returns to his homeland in Edo State, to build an ultra-modern hospital. This act of patriotism is an attempt for him to contribute to the development of his people. Accompanied by his America-trained Rivers State friend, Gregory (Francis Duru), and his America-trained Kenyan girlfriend, Julie (Beverly Naya), David is warmly received by a community that is proud of the achievement of one of their own, in a civic reception, mercurially anchored by Usunobun (Moses Obakpolor). But the ceremony ends abruptly because in her excitement to take some commemorative photographs, perhaps to remember the conviviality in the community, Julie sits on the throne of the paramount ruler, the Enogie (Justus Esiri). The people are all shocked because this act is against their traditions; and what had started as a festive event turns sour.

Incidentally, this supposed act of innocence propels the rising action of the play. The tradition is that apart from members of the Enogie's immediate family, any woman who sits on the throne automatically becomes his wife. Thus, the people insist that Julie must marry the Enogie as tradition demands. To Dave, it is unthinkable for him to live to see his father take over his fiancé under the guise of a "primitive" tradition that needs to be modernised; to Julie, it is an act that was not premeditated and could be forgiven by the gods once they are appeased; to young spinsters in the village like Esohe (Uche Jombo), it is good riddance as there is the possibility of the Prince, David, looking in her direction for marriage; to the council of chiefs, it is a tradition that has to be obeyed; and to the Enogie, it is an opportunity to add a seventh wife and so Julie has to get used to her new role as the Enogie's wife.

Then follows a period of conspiracy, intrigues, blackmail, and mudslinging as the Enogie, supported by chiefs like Eguavoen



(Chiwetalu Agu) and the self-styled village activist, Usunobun (Moses Obakpolor), insist that if David has to be the next Enogie, then he has to respect and uphold the sanctity of the traditions of the people, by allowing Julie to marry the Enogie (Justus Esiri). There is however a twist in the conflict when David discloses the original intention of their relocating from the United States, where they were doing very well, back to Nigeria. When he tells the Enogie and the chiefs in council that they had come to build an ultra-modern hospital to provide good and affordable health care to the people, Chief Iyekoetin (Cliff Igbinovia) and his friend are quite impressed and make a case for Julie to get a reprieve. She is eventually left off the hook but it opens another area of conflict because Chief Eguavoen is unhappy that he would not get the contract to build the hospital or even the post office. He thus advises the Enogie against approving the parcel of land for the hospital project, claiming that David has a hidden agenda. To crown this perfidy, an outrageous price tag of \$100,000 (one hundred thousand dollars) is put on the land for the project. Furthermore, Chief Iyekoetin and his friend who are sympathetic to David's cause are suspended from the chief's council with immediate effect.

However, there is a redeeming force in the youths, who protest the retrogressive action of the Enogie and his chiefs. This is in recognition of the good intentions of David and his friends, and what the people stand to benefit if the project is executed. David also makes the Enogie to realise that his stool is actually answerable to higher traditional authorities. He stresses that if he (Enogie) refuses to approve the allocation of land for the project, the matter could be taken up; and that he could indeed be asked to vacate the stool. It dawns on the Enogie that he is enjoying certain pecks by virtue of the stool, because all his wives demonstrate that if he is made to abdicate the throne, they would abandon him. He consequently approves the parcel of land for the hospital project, and the good news makes Julie, who had left David to re-unite with her parents in Nairobi, flies back to join David and Gregory in the programme of national development.

A critical reading of *Home to Exile* shows that it is a conscious attempt by Lancelot Imasuen to draw attention on the need for Nigerians to reappraise our spirit of patriotism. In the first place,



David and Greg are Nigerians, who have that love for the country and are ready to sacrifice their seven digit income to come and develop the health care system. Unfortunately, their good intentions are misunderstood because of the greedy disposition of chiefs like Eguavoen and the gullible Enogie. The fact remains that the brain drain from the late 1970s to the present day has affected Nigeria to a great extent. There are many Nigerians who can stand among the best in their professional areas around the world, but they do not have the will to return home like Dave and his friends, because of one limitation or the other. Take for example the exploits of our own Phillip Emeagwali, the world acclaimed computer scientist that the American government cannot afford to lose sight of just for one minute. Nigerians also abound in medical practice, football, and other sporting events all over the world that are not identifying with the country because of one debilitating factor or the other.

But then, coming at a time government is calling on Nigerians all over the world to return home and contribute to national development, the experience of Dave is instructive. In as much as there is need for our brothers and sisters in Diaspora to answer the clarion call, we must not lose sight of the fact is that development can only thrive under a peaceful atmosphere. There are cases of those at home, most times, wanting to take advantage of their brothers and sisters coming home. If they are charged with certain responsibilities by a brother or sister in Diaspora, they end up converting such situations into personal advantage. If it is a building project, for example, they use the money to build houses for themselves, or worse still for ego boosting: buy cars, marry new wives, or other vain pleasures.

In *Home in Exile*, for example, Chief Eguavoen has a change of heart on the issue of Julie marrying Enogie, when David tells them about the developmental projects in the pipeline. From that point, he tries everything possible to ensure that Julie gets a reprieve. And in the euphoria of the "amnesty" that Julie gets from the Enogie and the council of chiefs, he puts in a special request to be awarded the contract to build the hospital or the post office. But when David brushes aside the request, knowing that he (Eguavoen) does not have the capacity to handle such projects, he makes another detour and becomes confrontational, scheming to see that Chief Iyekoetin



and his fellow pro-David chief are suspended from the chief's council. Incidentally, he plays on the intelligence and gullibility of the Enogie, who exemplifies the mentality of contemporary Nigerian leaders.

Enogie is a traditional ruler who had the wherewithal to send his heir abroad to study, which shows that he wants an enlightened successor. Unfortunately, he is not ready to share in the knowledge which he used his money to acquire for his son. He is content with marrying as many wives as possible, even when it is obvious that he cannot satisfy the sexual desires of all the women. When Julie inadvertently sits on the throne, he takes a hard stance, maintaining that the tradition of the people must be upheld. He is not concerned about the future happiness of Julie or the emotional trauma Dave will go through; rather, he tells her to start getting used to the idea of being the newest wife. Of interest is the fact that when the opportunity affords itself, that is at the time Julie rests on his laps crying and begging for forgiveness, he is eaten up with lust and starts caressing her. It is thus not surprising that David drags her away from him before he causes more harm.

The visionless leadership of the Enogie is also reflected in his adamant position not to approve the parcel of land for the hospital project. He believes the claims by village master of ceremony, Usunobun (Moses Obakpolor), who displays some knowledge of current affairs and the happenings in government. With the strong support of Chief Eguavoen and his cohorts, the Enogie is not ready to listen to any wise counsel. Unfortunately, he realises too late that the youths are not ready to condone reactionary leaders. Unlike the many protests that we are familiar with in Nigeria, which may not have strong strategic reasons, that of the youths in the film is justified in the sense that they were reacting to the retrogressive disposition of the traditional ruler. They take to the streets because instead of attracting and embracing developmental projects to the community, the Enogie was being a cog in the wheel of progress. They know that if David and his friends are given the necessary support, the people would live more fulfilling lives in the community – they would have good health care, easy communication, and receive better attention from the government of the day. They want a leader who will feel for the people, and have their well being at heart. They want chiefs who would advise their leader positively, and not direct



their energies towards negative actions.

In another breath, we see a new direction being charted for our youths, in the sense that they listen to wise counsel in the course of their protest. When David meets them and tells them to eschew violence, they listen to him immediately. This, of course, is an area of concern in Nigeria, especially the volatile Niger Delta, where protests have been used as weapons of intimidation or coercion. There is no gainsaying the fact that our youths feel that the elders have had their say in the governance of the country, so they should give way. And so, they have formed many militant groups to propagate and advance their socio-political ideological viewpoints. This war of wits is yet to abate as the elders, in the mould of Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB), also feel that the youths do not have the capacity to lead the nation. Lancelot Imasuen appears to be saying that in present day Nigeria, the youths have to take a stand and point the way forward. Most importantly, protests have to be well motivated, well structured, and well executed, in order not to be hijacked by self serving opportunists or political jobbers.

On another level, the actions of David, Gregory and Julie, are of interest. Dave is the heir to the throne, who had imbibed some traits of western education. He talks and acts like an American, sometimes using slangs to address his father and the chief. Though he realises that the people are deep rooted in cultural practices, he would not want any of his friends to look at such practices with disdain, because he is ready to defend them. He sometimes turns aggressive but soon becomes his normal amiable and loving personality. He does not capitalise on the support of the youths, as many present day young men are wont to do. Instead of instigating the protesting youths, he rather calms them down before intimating his father. On the other hand, Gregory, an Ikwerre from Rivers State, is ready to help a close friend, David, in actualising his patriotic dream. Despite the skirmishes with David, he plays along, unlike Julie who runs away, and endures till the end when the chiefs accede to their request.

It could be argued that Julie, a Kenyan girl who had been removed from the African culture, symbolises expatriate component in development initiatives in Nigeria. Most times, there are foreign interests, ready to partner with federal, state or local governments,



to embark on one project or the other. There are cases of youths putting up one demand or the other, all in the bid to frustrate such development initiatives. How else can a Community Development Committee (CDC) ask a contracting firm to pay one hundred million naira before a road can be constructed to link their community? Where such an obnoxious demand is not meant immediately, they disrupt the progress of work; or take some of the workers hostage, and release them only on the payment of ransom. Little wonder then that like Julius Berger Plc packing out of the Niger Delta because of youth restiveness, Julie had to leave for Kenya because of the heat they were facing. But the redeeming thing is that when there was a truce and the parcel of land was approved by the Enogie, she quickly returned to the waiting arms of David.

Enogie, on the hand, learns a very hard lesson that leadership is only a position of trust; and that once one is out of office, one loses followership and everything that pertains to that office. Faced with the threat of the youths to unseat him, Enogie calls his harem to find out those that will stand by him peradventure he is pushed out of office. To his dismay, ironically, even his first wife abandons him to his fate. He thus sees himself as being adrift, bereft of any source of comfort from the same women who had enjoyed his cover materially, socially, and politically. Of course, one of his wives is quick to point out that she married him because it conferred status on her. The implication of this is that whatever image Nigeria may have in the eyes of the international community is from the perceptions about the land and the people. Thus, what people see of us in the films would go a long way in building perceptions or reshaping them.

Take for example, the costumes of wives of the Enogie on the dining table, the cultural group, the spinning masquerade, the chiefs and the Enogie, or the harem and Julie in the civic reception scene. They all reflect the rich cultural heritage of the Edo people of the Niger Delta, which shows that we can make a strong statement through our indigenous dress culture. The red velvet cloth and beads worn by the Enogie's wives and the members of the cultural troupe give them that regal appearance. Unfortunately, successive governments have not given serious attention to our national dress sense, as one would find in Ghana, for example. Even banks that



used to devote Fridays to Nigerian/African dresses have gradually allowed it to degenerate to display of T-shirts of the banks. It is not surprising then that the dressing of our youths has become an issue of general concern. This informed the April 2010 national workshop on "Promoting Nigerian Dress Culture for National Identity," organised by the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), in Abuja. It is common knowledge that *kente* is a fabric that is made in Ghana; and it is used to design various dress patterns indigenous to that country. Nigerians are also very familiar with the *Senegalese* dress, which has become very popular, especially with the northerners. Thus, we can posit that the film, *Home in Exile*, attempts in its own way to promote Nigerian dress culture peculiar to the Edo people.

The menace of motorcycles (popularly called *okada* in the Niger Delta), is also highlighted in the film. Though used briefly more as a teaser, the message is very apt. The film starts with a shot of a bus racing down the road. Camera cuts to an *okada* also galloping down from a track road to the main road. The bus driver sees the *okada* and attempts to avoid a collision; but it is too late. The vehicle knocks down the *okadaman* and crashes into the bush. David and his friends stop at the accident scene and try to rescue the accident victims. They find out, to their dismay, that the nearest hospital is quite a distance away. This scenario is a daily occurrence on our roads. There are many orthopaedic cases in our hospitals because of the rampaging devastation caused by *okada* riders. It was thus a thing of joy when erstwhile Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai banned their operations in Abuja, the FCT.

The interpretation of the role of Julie by Beverly Naya is worthy of commendation, considering the fact that she is just being introduced into Nollywood. Her diction as an American trained Kenyan is quite good, considering the fact that she acted with established actors like Desmond Elliot and Francis Duru, the latter being a well-trained method actor. Justus Esiri is his usual confident self in the portrayal of the role of the Enogie. While Chiwetelu Agu plays his vintage cantankerous character very well. But it would have been better if Lancelot Imasuen had disallowed his typical exclamations, which have become his trademark in every film. The audience should see a character through an actor, and not the other



way round, since he would not be playing himself but the role. Also, the exterior establishing shot of the building on the flash back to California, USA, could have been something else, to create some contrast between the exterior of the palace. One could even conclude that it was the same building that was used. The same applies to the use of one bedroom for all the interiors involving Dave, Greg and Julie. But then we know that ambivalences like these are the characteristics of Nollywood.

Shot on Sony **Z1U** DV-camera, *Home in Exile* could be mistaken for a cine production because of the well mastered fine picture quality. Coming from the creative imagination of an accomplished director, popularly known as "De Gov'nor," with video film credits like *Issakaba* (2000), *Last Burial* (2000), *August Meeting* (2001), *Emotional Cracks* (2002), *Private Sin* (2003), *Critical Decision* (2004), and *Games Women Play* (2004), one can only say "the men are being separated from the boys" in Nollywood; and Lancelot Imasuen will surely be one of the last men standing to take the industry to the next level internationally.

## Conclusion

In this work we have noted that the rise and development of the video film industry in Nigeria, which has come to be referred to as Nollywood is salutary to the image of the country. The redeeming fact is that our children have come to identify with, not only the Hollywood stars, but Nigerian video film stars. We also noted that one selling point in Nollywood, which has generated interest in advanced film cultures, is the resort to the video format in productions.

Furthermore, we observed that countries are tacitly selling their cultural values and images through their films. It explains why advanced countries now use film as an instrument for influencing others under the cover of Cultural Diplomacy. This is because culture has a profound influence on all aspects of behaviour, determining how individuals perceive and interpret phenomena. The argument is that stakeholders in the Nigerian video film industry need to understand their role as cultural ambassadors and contribute their quota towards building a positive image for the country through films. This is underscored by our submission that perhaps apart from



soccer, Nollywood appears to have projected Nigeria more than any other sector of the economy internationally.

From a critical reading of Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Home in Exile*, we have attempted to show how painstaking efforts could be geared towards the Nigerian image project by Nollywood. The work could be interpreted as a clarion call to our brothers and sisters in Diaspora to realise that they may claim to have naturalised in the United States, the United Kingdom, or may have found homes in Schengen countries; but they are still Nigerians and need to come back home and contribute their quota towards developing our communities. If the reverse is the case, they may be actually living in exile in wherever they call their homes. On the other hand, those back home, especially our corrupt and inept leaders, should provide the enabling environment for those coming to help develop the country. If not, we shall all be "home in exile."

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